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Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa

How the vast Afghani Empire on Punjabi soil disappeared in Kasur, Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar is a subject closely associated with the campaigns of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, the Marshal of the Khalsa and terror for the Afghans. Being the 'Murat of the Khalsa' as he was appropriately called by Sir Henry Griffin, the famous British dignitary and a prominent writer of significant treatise on the Sikhs, his name figures among those patriots who participated bravely rather passionately in almost all battles fought constantly against the Afghans during the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh for a period of three decades from A.D. 1807 to A.D. 1837.

Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, the typical product of his age was born at Gujranwala now in the West Pakistan in A.D. 1791 in Uppal family in the house of Sardar Gurdial Singh to Dharam Kaur. He was the only son of his parents. The ancestors of Nalwa sardars were originally from Majitha town situated in the vicinity of Amritsar. His grandfather Sardar Hardas Singh engaged in the service of Sukarchakia Misl was killed in an expedition undertaken by the Misl in A.D. 1762. Gurdial Singh, the

father of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa followed the profession of his father and took part in various campaigns of Sukarchakia Sardars - Charat Singh and Mahan Singh in the capacity of Deradar . Nalwa was born in this home He expired in 1798 when Hari Singh was only seven years of age and was thus looked after with care and caution by his maternal uncle who took him to his house. In those days training in the feats of war was deemed necessary and physical education attracted much attention. Accordingly, Hari Singh who was physically quite stout and strong and impressive too in appearance when grew up, learnt the art of warfare. It is said that he was indefatigable and could sit on horse back for long hours. Hari Singh received his preliminary education in languages of Gurmukhi, Urdu, Persian. Baron Charles Hugel states that Hari Singh besides his general knowledge about the statistics of many of the European states, was well versed in Persian. He impressed him extremelly with his overall achievements.

Hari Singh was administered Pahul when grew up and assumed the responsibility of supervising the affairs of his father's jagir. Hari singh presented himself before Maharaja Ranjit singh in his open darbar which he used to hold for a week or so on the eve of Basant fair every year. The Maharaja was so impressed by the feats of chivalry shown by him that he was taken in the royal service as a personal khidmatgar or an attendant. Maharaja commissioned him in 1804 A.D. by granted him a command of 700 footmen and horses with the honour of Sardar. Why Hari singh is called "Nalwa" and not Uppal. The reason is that he came to be know by the said title by way of an incident which took place during the early days of his joining the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. During the course of hunting expedition he happened to be a victim of a sudden attack of a tiger. The attack was so subtle and unexpected that he did not gain time to pull out his sword. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa faced the crucial situation with such boldness that he managed to catch hold

of the jaw of the beast forcefully with his hands and pushed it away with the prowess of arms arranging thus to kill it with his sword. Baron Charles Hugel says he was called Nalwa for 'having cloven the head of a tiger who had already seized him as its prey'.

The Sikhs often passing through a series of vicissitudes, first establish themselves as a political power in the Punjab in 1765 A.D. But their mode of fighting then was desultory and hardly suited to the requirements of a well-settled state, However Maharaja Ranjit Singh 'Built up a strong , centralised and effectively controlled military system by amalgamating the best elements in foreign with best elements found in the indigenous fighting mechanisms. Hari Singh Nalwa's significant military campaign was that of Kasur, the so called 'mythological rival of Lahore', in 1807 A.D. Hari Singh Nalwa along with Sardar Jodh singh Ramgarhia, Sardar Nihal Singh Attari, Baba Akali Phula Singh, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Dhanna singh Malwai, and Sardar Fateh singh Kalianwala marched on to Kasur to subjugate its Afghani owner Kutab-ud-din Khan. Sikhs laid siege for three months after which Kutab-ud-din Khan surrendered. Hari Singh Nalwa, of course, was the first to march inside the city gate of Kasur with his division called 'Sher-Dil-Rajman.' The troops under him caught Kutab-Ud-Din alive and presented him before Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh made him retire to a territory of Mamdot as a jagir, subject to his supplying 100 horsemen for service when required.

Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's next significant military achievement was to reduce to submission Sardar Jiwan Singh, the ruler of Sialkote who was asked by the Maharaja to surrender his possessions. Jiwan Singh gave tough fight for two days after which he raised his hands in peace. The

strategic significance of Sialkote lay in the fact that it was a very fertile tract extending its dimensions upto Jammu. Moreover, Maharaja Ranjit Singh after bringing to submission a major part of the Central Punjab made it a centre of his further political aggrandisement.

City of multan

Hari Singh Nalwa's next significant military achievement was the conquest of Multan. before annexing Multan in 1818 A.D., six expeditions were sent by the suzrain of Lahore. Resultantly tribute was collected everytime, annexion was never visualized and attempted. Hari Singh contributed in all of these six campaigns as well as conquest of Multan. Multan had a great commercial and strategic importance having been the gateway of Afghanistan. It is stated that working boats from the Jhelum, Ravi and Chenab were forced to work for invariable supply of provisions. Illahi Bux of the artillery forces of Ranjit Singh made conspicuous arrangements for battering the forts of Multan. During Mughal rule it was an important headquarter and fell into Afghan custody after the fall of empire. After Multan, Sardar Hari Singh also subjugated the territories of Mitha Tiwana, Rajauri, Naushera, etc. from which strip tribute was realized for the kingdom of Lahore.

Then Maharaja turned towards Kashmir. Hari Singh Nalwa's regiment was in forefront in campaign to get back Shah Shuja from the Governor of Kashmir, Shah Shuja's wife Wafa Begum had promised Kohinoor Diamond for Maharaja if her husband was to be freed from prison of Kashmir. In 1814 A.D., Hari Singh forces routed Kashmiris forces. Shah Shuja gave Ranjit Singh kohinoor Diamond, from that day on till his death Maharaja Ranjit Singh wore that Diamond on his right shoulder,

it was his pride. Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed Governor of Kashmir. Immediately, he ordered to ban cow slaughter, such was an effect that to this day, Kashmiri Muslims don't eat beef. Jaziya, etc , the taxes which Hindu and Sikh population had to pay to their Muslim rulers for "not being a Muslim" were eradicated. For these obvious reasons, several Muslim historians had labelled Hari Singh Nalwa as a tyrant. His rule they called "Sikha Shahi" or the "Rule of Sikhs." But no matter what, Hari Singh Nalwa and his forces never destroyed any Mosques or abducted Muslim Women, etc. all those atrocities which Mughals and Pathans had committed on the local non-Muslims population. (It was around 1700's A.D that majority of Punjabi population became Muslim owing to the atrocities by Aurungzeb the sixth Mughal emperor) .

Jamrud fort as constructed by Hari Singh Nalwa

The Afghans of North West region across river Indus around Peshawar were divided into several tribes (They still are). They were sort of savage people which would not obey any rule. From time to time the Punjabi forces from Lahore were sent there to put them down. Each time they would offer some tribute and then again revolt. To totally take control of these areas Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave command to Hari Singh Nalwa. Also to stop the attacks of Afghans on Punjabi soil, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and others decided to put a series of forts to build up the defenses of the Punjabi frontier. From Attock to the Khyber Pass series of small forts were built under Hari Singh Nalwa to keep Afghans in check. The most important part of this fortification was to put a complete halt at invaders who had attacked India entering from Khyber pass in West, starting with Greeks in 500 B.C.. So after 2300 Years of constant defeat and humiliation of Punjabi and Indian people Maharaja Ranjit Singh was able to totally shut down this historic route of invasion

into India. It had been used by Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Mughals, Mongols, Tatars, Afghanis, etc. And on top of that there is no denying fact that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was quite conscious of the significance of North West frontier province for the defense of his territorial acquisitions.

A significant battle was fought here by Hari Singh Nalwa when he defeated and caught the self styled Rajput chief Ghulam ali and send him over to Lahore. Maharaja was so happy that he allowed Hari Singh to strike a coin in his name in Kashmir. Then in the tract of Pakhli and Dhamtur Nalwa with his usual sagacity and vision, was able to pacify a revolt against the Lahore court arising in the region. This is also acknowledged by Syed Mohd. Latif, a biased famous Punjabi Muslim historian. Henry Lepel Griffin in connection with Sardar Nalwa in Pakhli states "obedience was not an easy to Hari Singh for wild mountaineers to the number of 20,000 opposed to his passage, on this way to mankera and at Pakli he was compelled to halt with his force of 7,000 men. Pakli has long been a spot dreaded by merchants, for the hillmen of that place were accustomed to demand a toll on shawl, wood and other merchandise. Hari Singh after vain efforts to induce the enemy to yield him a passage, attacked them with vigor, and storming their blockades defeated them with great slaughter. After this he imposed a fine of Rs 5 on each house in the district.

Since virtually peace in Punjab was only possible by sealing the border of Kabul, and Peshawar being geographically situated in its close proximity was an indispensable asset for Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Thus, ultimately the strip of Peshawar became the bone of contention between Maharaja and Afghanis. After the conquest of Attock,

Maharaja's solid and concrete target of conquest was Peshawar as the exigency of time so demanded.

The murder of Wazir Fateh Khan of Kabul in A.D. 1818 provided Maharaja the desired opportunity to attempt the conquest of Peshawar as consequent to his murder the two major factions of the Afghans-The Sadazui's and Barqzai's-came to be seen at dagger's drawn with each other. Moreover, the possession of Peshawar except as a step to further acquisitions, does not appear to have been advantageous to Ranjeet with additional evil of leading Sikhs into constant collision with the savage tribes of Afghans.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh availed himself of anarchy in Kabul and made as invasion of Peshawar, the South-West-Eastern frontiers of Peshawar with Punjab having been neglected by Sultan Yar Mohammed Khan and Dost Mohammad Khan, the then Afghan governors of Peshawar who found themselves helpless and vacated the city. Punjabi forces with Mian Ghausia and Diwan Mohkam Chand leading the charge With Sardar Nalwa as general of Cavalry didn't had to face any fight what so ever. Maharaja appointed Jahan Dad Khan, ex governor of Attock as new governor of Peshawar in November 1818.

Then in 1822, Dost Mohammad Khan and Yar Mohammad Khan were able to expel the Maharaja's nominee Jahan Dad Khan from Peshawar and thus another expedition was undertook by Punjabi forces. This time the forces were being led by cavalry by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Foot soldiers by Dhanna Singh Malwai, and Jagat Singh Attariwala, Artillery

by Mian Ghausia. Dost Mohammad Khan managed to reconcile by paying a handsome nazrana to Maharaja and by accepting the submission to Khalsa kingdom rather than to kingdom of Kabul. In Jan 1823, Muhammad Azim, the Kabul wazir occupied Peshawar with the assistance of large army. Ranjit Singh sent another expedition, the battles of Jahangira and Naushera were fought in March 1823 where Sardar Nalwa, Akali Phula Singh, Gorkha Bal Bhadra, Mian Ghausia, Misr Diwan Chand, Sardar Attar Singh marched in the battle field at the head of their divisions and gave a defeat to the Afghans in the battle of Jahangira but a more serious and awe inspiring battle was fought at Naushera which is also known as the battle of Tibbi Tehri. General Allard and Ventura's participation in this battle with their divisions and trained army of Lahore kingdom with Akali division of the army had absolutely no match for untrained militia who although surpassed in sheer numbers, Afghans after a great massacre submitted and Naushera was captured. Albeit, the Lahore troops lost an indispensable commander, Akali Phula Singh whose dashing feats of warfare had surprised one and all. Hari Singh Nalwa played a conspicuous role first by inflicting a crushing defeat upon the enemy and secondly by pursuing the enemy after the defeat in order to be sure about the victory of the Lahore troops. The battle of Naushera made it evident to the frontier tribesmen that the Afghan militia was weaker than those of Lahore troops. This battle sealed the further prospects of Muhammad Azim of Kabul and established the Sikh supremacy over Peshawar.

In 1827, Sayed Ahmad Bareili who claimed himself to be the messenger of Prophet Mohammad inspired the tribesmen by fervent appeals to recover their territory from the "kafir" or "Infidel" kingdom of Lahore. Yar Mohammad Khan also joined these crusaders. These forces captured the Peshawar. Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent Hari Singh Nalwa to recapture the Peshawar as well as major parts around khyber pass.

Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa gave blow to the rising power of Syed Ahmad Bareli Griffin states that when Sayed Ahmad roused all the fanatic power of Yusafzais for a holy war against Sikhs and was joined by the Barkazi chief of Peshawar, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa with his 25,000 men prevented Syed Ahmad from crossing Indus. Then Lahore troops crossed Indus and invaded Peshawar, Syed Ahmad and his crusaders were butchered. Hari Singh gave Sayed a great setback. Peshawar was pillaged, Palaces were destroyed, tribute of Peshawar was increased and the son of Yar Mohammad Khan was carried away by Hari Singh as hostage. Then again, in 1830, Maharaja had to sent Prince Sher singh to Peshawar to get tribute from Sayed Ahmad which was paid.

Hari Singh was put to call of duty in 1834 A.D for annexing Peshawar to the dominion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. On 6th May 1834, Peshawar was made part of Punjab and Hari Singh Nalwa was made his first non-Muslim governor. But most of Hari Singh time was spent at Lahore, his division was situated in Lahore. A year after annexation of Peshawar, Dost Mohammad, now the Afghan ruler of Kabul attempted to regain his supremacy over strip of Peshawar. Tribesmen from Yusafzai, Mohmmad and Khatak tribes of the vicinity were appealed in the name of religion to jump into holy war or jehad against Sikhs in order to oust them from their region. But due to unknown reasons these Afghan troops retreated long before confrontation.

Dost Mohammad Khan did not rest contented and after mobilizing all his resources dispatched his son Akbar in A.D. 1837 to recover Peshawar which he did. Resultantly, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was sent at the head of Lahore troops to face Afghans. He got his forces to Peshawar. Jamrud turned out to be the field of battle this time where a formidable

battle was fought. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa had earlier build a fort on the entrance of Khyber pass called fort of Jamrud, this fort was being commanded by Sardar Mahan Singh Mirpura. For want of man and war material Nalwa strove extraordinary hard, inspite of this he did not loose his heart. Urgent messages were sent to Lahore and Peshawar for materials. For want of timely help the Sardar was of course, killed but the Afghans could not dislodge the 500 Punjabi troops from the fort of Jamrud. General Hari Singh Nalwa give his last command to his men to not to disclose his death and continue giving enemy a good fight.

ATTACK

Sir Lepel Griffin, gives a detailed and comprehensive account of Sardar Nalwa's campaign of Jamrud. He points out that Sardar was directed to build a fort at Jamrud situated at the entrance of Khber pass from the walls of which Maharaja might glance Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Sardar got built a small port which was quite impregnable to the artillery fire and could hold on for several weeks of pounding. The Dost Mohammad Khan, with 7,000 horse, 2000 matchlock men and 18 guns. His three sons with their forces and a force of 12,000 to 15,000 of Khaibiris joined the main force and started pounding the fort. Mahan singh Mirpura requested help from Peshwar where Hari singh Nalwa was ailing with fever. While giving an account of the march of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa at the head of Lahore troops to give fight to the Afghans at battle of Jamrud, Sahai singh Ragi in Punjabi states:

Hari immediately sent some horsemen to Lahore for more reinforcement and he along with his soldiers went to Jamrud. Reinforcement under Hari Singh Nalwa give a new life to the garrison and attack of Afghanis was repulsed with vigour. Griffin further states

that when Hari Singh Nalwa along with about five of his companion went outside of the fort to inspect a breach in a wall, he was struck by two balls, one in the side and the other in stomach. In spite of them understanding that he was mortally injured, the Nalwa sardar managed to ride as far as his camp lest the troops be discouraged. Then laying on floor he gives his last order to his few trusted men, that was to not to disclose the secret of his death. Qadryar a famous Ragi sings this in Punjabi :

Hari Singh further imparted instructions to his soldiers to cover his dead body after lifting it from the ground and placing it on a cot.

Thus the great Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, with the terror of whose name Afghan mothers used to quiten their fretful children attained his martyrdom.

Salute to Great Sikh Warrior, Marshall of the Khalsa Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa

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Dr G.S. Nayyar "Marshall of the Khalsa."

Early life

Hari Singh Nalwa was born in Gujranwala, in the Majha region of Punjab to Dharam Kaur and Gurdial Singh Uppal, in a Sikh Uppal family. After his father died in 1798, he was raised by his mother. In 1801, at the age of ten, he took Amrit Sanchar and was initiated as a Khalsa. At the age of twelve, he began to manage his father's estate and took up horse riding.

In 1804, at the age of fourteen, his mother sent him to the court of Ranjit Singh to resolve a property dispute. Ranjit Singh decided the arbitration in his favor because of his background and aptitude. Hari Singh had explained that his father and grandfather had served under Maha Singh and Charat Singh, the Maharaja's ancestors, and demonstrated his skills as a horseman and musketeer. Ranjit Singh gave him a position at the court as a personal attendant.

Hari Singh had two wives, as customary at the time, Raj Kaur from Rawalpindi and Desan Kaur. He had four sons and two daughters.

Military career

During a hunt in 1804, a tiger attacked him and also killed his horse. His fellow hunters attempted to protect him but he refused their offers and allegedly killed the tiger by himself bare handily by tearing the tiger apart from its mouth, thus earning the cognomen Baghmar (Tiger-killer). Whether he was by that time already serving in the military is unknown but he was commissioned as Sardar, commanding 800 horses and footmen, in that year.

The twenty major battles of Hari Singh Nalwa (either participated or was in command):

Battle of Kasur (1807)

Hari Singh's first significant participation in a Sikh conquest on assuming charge of an independent contingent was in 1807, at the capture of Kasur. This place had long been a thorn in the side of Ranjit Singh's power because of its proximity to his capital city of Lahore. It was captured in the fourth attempt. This attack was led by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Jodh Singh Ramgarhia. During the campaign the Sardar showed remarkable bravery and dexterity. The Sardar was granted a Jagir in recognition of his services.

Battle of Sialkot (1807)

Ranjit Singh nominated Hari Singh Nalwa to take Sialkot from its ruler Jiwan Singh. This was his first battle under an independent command. The two armies were engaged for a couple of days, eventually seventeen-year-old Hari Singh carried the day Nalwa lead the army to victory and planted the Sikh Flag on top of the fort.

Battle of Attock (1813)

The fort of Attock was a major replenishment point for all armies crossing the Indus. In the early 19th century, Afghan appointees of the Kingdom of Kabul held this fort, as they did most of the territory along this frontier. This battle was fought and won by the Sikhs on the banks of the Indus under the leadership of Dewan Mokham Chand, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's general, against Wazir Fatteh Khan and his brother Dost Mohammad Khan, on behalf of Shah Mahmud of Kabul. Besides Hari Singh Nalwa, Hukam Singh Attariwala, Shyamu Singh, Khalsa Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Behmam Singh Malliawala actively participated in this battle. With the conquest of Attock, the adjoining regions of Hazara-i-Karlugh and Gandhgarh became tributary to the Sikhs. In

1815, Sherbaz Khan of Gandhgarh challenged Hari Singh Nalwa's authority and was defeated.

Abortive attempt on Kashmir (1814)

The Sikhs made an attempt to take Kashmir soon after the Battle of Attock. The army was under the general command of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who camped at Rajauri. The troops were led towards Srinagar by Ram Dayal, grandson of Dewan Mokham Chand, while Jamadar Khushal Singh commanded the van, Hari Singh Nalwa and Nihal Singh Attariwala brought up the rear. Lack of provisions, delay in the arrival of reinforcements, bad weather and treachery of the allies lead to the Sikhs to retreat. The next few years were spent in subduing Muslim chiefs within the Kashmir territory, en route Srinagar Valley. In 1815–16, Hari Singh Nalwa attacked and destroyed the stronghold of the traitorous Rajauri chief.

Conquest of Mahmudkot (1816)

In preparation of the conquest of the strongly fortified Mankera, Ranjit Singh decided to approach it from its southern extremity. After the Baisakhi of 1816, Misr Diwan Chand, Illahi Bakhsh, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Nihal Singh Attariwala and Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by seven paltans and the topkhana went towards Mahmudkot. When news of its conquest arrived, it left the Maharaja so elated at the success of Sikh arms that he celebrated this victory with the firing of cannons. Two years later, on their way to Multan, the Sikhs captured the forts of Khangarh and Muzzaffargarh.

Battle of Multan (1818)

The winter of 1810 saw a jubilant Sikh army stationed near Multan in the Bari Doab. They were riding high on the success of having

conquered the Chuj Doab. The possession of the city of Multan was taken with little resistance; however, the fort could not be captured. The fort was bombarded and mined without effect. Sardar Nihal Singh Attariwala and the young Hari Singh Nalwa were seriously wounded. A fire pot thrown from the walls of the fort fell on Hari Singh and he was so badly burnt that it was some months before he was fit for service. Ranjit Singh was disconcerted beyond measure at the length of the siege and perforce had to abandon the attempt. Multan was finally conquered under the nominal command of Kharak Singh and the actual command of Misr Diwan Chand. It was a fiercely contested battle in which Muzzaffar Khan and his sons defended the place with exemplary courage, but they could not withstand the onslaught of the Sikhs. Hari Singh Nalwa was "chiefly instrumental" in the capture of the citadel.

Peshawar becomes tributary (1818)

When Shah Mahmud's son, Shah Kamran, killed their Barakzai Vazir Fateh Khan in August 1818 the Sikhs took advantage of the resulting confusion and their army formally forded the Indus and entered Peshawar, the summer capital of the Kingdom of Kabul (modern-day Afghanistan), for the first time. Thereafter, Hari Singh Nalwa was deputed towards Peshawar in order to keep the Sikh dabdaba kayam — maintain the pressure.

Mitha Tiwana becomes his jagir (1818)

In the beginning of 1819, Hari Singh accompanied Misr Diwan Chand to collect tribute from the Nawab of Mankera. On completion of the mission, Diwan Chand crossed the river Chenab along with his topkhana and set up his camp in Pindi Bhattian near Chiniot. He was asked to leave Hari Singh stationed in the suburbs of Nurpur and Mitha Tiwana. Hari Singh must have achieved significant success for soon

thereafter the Maharaja bestowed all the possessions of the Tiwana chiefs in jagir on the Sardar.

Kashmir becomes a part of the Punjab (1819)

In April 1819, the Sikh army marched towards Kashmir. On this occasion, Prince Kharak Singh held nominal command. Misr Diwan Chand led the vanguard, while Hari Singh Nalwa brought up the rear for the support of the leading troops. The third division, under the personal command of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, expedited supplies and conveyed these to the advance troops. On the morning of 5 July 1819, the Sikh columns advanced to the sound of bugles. A severe engagement took place between the two armies and the Sikhs captured Kashmir. Great rejoicing followed in the Sikh camp and the cities of Lahore and Amritsar were illuminated for three successive nights. Thus came to an end the five centuries of Muslim rule in Kashmir. Two years later, as Governor of Kashmir, Hari Singh Nalwa put down the rebellion of the most troublesome Khakha chief, Gulam Ali.



Coin issued by Hari Singh, minted in Peshawar. Dated 1837

Battle of Pakhli (1819)

Under the Afghans, Hazara-i-Karlugh, Gandhgarh and Gakhar territory were governed from Attock. Kashmir collected the revenue from the upper regions of Pakhli, Damtaur and Darband. Numerous

attempts by the Sikhs to collect revenue from Hazara-i-Karlugh not only met with failure, but also the loss of prominent Sikh administrators and commanders. Following the Sikh conquest of Kashmir, tribute was due from Pakhli, Damtaur, and Darband. On his return to the Punjab plains from the Kashmir Valley, Hari Singh and his companions followed the traditional kafila (caravan) route through Pakhli hoping to collect tribute from the region. The Sikh request for Nazrana resulted in the usual "fighting and mulcting"; the party however, was successful in their mission.

Battle of Mangal (1821)

Hari Singh's most spectacular success in the region of Hazara came two years later. On the successful conclusion of his governorship of Kashmir, he departed from the Valley and crossed the river Kishenganga at Muzaffarabad with 7000-foot soldiers. Hari Singh Nalwa traversed the hazardous mountainous terrain successfully, however when his entourage reached Mangal he found his passage opposed. Mangal, the ancient capital of Urasa was now the stronghold of the chief of the Jaduns who controlled the entire region of Damtaur. Hari Singh requested the tribesmen for a passage through their territory, but they demanded a tax on all the Kashmir goods and treasure he was taking with him. All trade kafilas routinely paid this toll. Hari Singh's claim that the goods he carried were not for trade purposes was not accepted. When parleying produced no result, a battle was to occur. Hari Singh then left to join forces with the Sikh army poised for an attack on Mankera, but after he had collected a fine from every house and built a fort in this vicinity.

Battle of Mankera (1822)

The Sindh Sagar Doab was chiefly controlled from Mankera and Mitha Tiwana. Nawab Hafiz Ahmed Khan, a relative of the Durranis, exerted considerable influence in this region. Besides Mankera, he commanded a vast area protected by 12 forts. With the weakening of Afghan rule in Kabul, the governors of Attock, Mankera, Mitha Tiwana and Khushab had declared their independence. Ranjit Singh celebrated the Dussehra of 1821 across the river Ravi, at Shahdera. Hari Singh, Governor of Kashmir, was most familiar with the territory that the Maharaja had now set his eyes on. Nalwa was summoned post-haste to join the Lahore Army already on its way towards the river Indus. The Maharaja and his army had crossed the Jehlum when Hari Singh Nalwa, accompanied by his Kashmir platoons, joined them at Mitha Tiwana. The Sikhs commenced offensive operations in early November.

Nawab Hafiz Ahmed's predecessor, Nawab Mohammed Khan, had formed a cordon around Mankera with 12 forts—Haidrabad, Maujgarh, Fatehpur, Pipal, Darya Khan, Khanpur, Jhandawala, Kalor, Dulewala, Bhakkar, Dingana and Chaubara. The Sikh army occupied these forts and soon the only place that remained to be conquered was Mankera itself. A few years earlier, the Nawab of Mankera had actively participated in the reduction of Mitha Tiwana. The Tiwanas, now feudatories of Hari Singh Nalwa, were eager participants in returning that favour to the Nawab. The force was divided into three parts—one column being under Hari Singh—and each column entered the Mankera territory by a different route; capturing various places en route all three columns rejoined near Mankera town. Mankera was besieged, with Nalwa's force being on the west of the fort.

The Nawab were allowed to proceed towards Dera Ismail Khan, which was granted to him as jagir. His descendants held the area until 1836.

Battle of Nowshera (Naushehra) (1823)

The Sikhs forayed into Peshawar for the first time in 1818, but did not occupy the territory. They were content with collecting tribute from Yar Mohammed, its Barakzai governor. Azim Khan, Yar Mohammed's half-brother in Kabul, totally disapproved of the latter's deference to the Sikhs and decided to march down at the head of a large force to vindicate the honour of the Afghans. Azim Khan wanted to avenge both, the supplication of his Peshawar brethren and the loss of Kashmir. Hari Singh Nalwa was the first to cross the Indus at Attock to the Sikh post of Khairabad; he was accompanied by Diwan Kirpa Ram and Khalsa Sher Singh, the Maharaja's teenaged son, beside 8,000 men.

The Afghan army was expected near Nowshera, on the banks of the river Kabul (Landai). Hari Singh's immediate plan was to capture the Yusafzai stronghold to the north of the Landai at Jehangira, and the Khattak territory to its south at Akora Khattak. Jehangira was a masonry fort with very strong towers and the Afghan Yusafzais offered tough resistance. Hari Singh entered the fort and established his thana there. The remaining troops re-crossed the Landai River and returned to their base camp at Akora. Mohammed Azim Khan had encamped roughly ten miles north-west of Hari Singh's position, on the right bank of the Landai, facing the town of Nowshera, awaiting Ranjit Singh's approach. The Sikhs had scheduled two battles – one along either bank of the Landai.

After Hari Singh had successfully reduced the Afghan tribal strongholds on either side of the river, Ranjit Singh departed from the fort of Attock. He crossed the Landai River at a ford below Akora, and set up his camp near the fort of Jehangira. The famous army commander Akali Phula Singh and Gurkha commander Bal Bahadur, with their respective troops, accompanied the Maharaja. The Afghan Barakzais witnessed the battle from across the river. They were not able to cross the Landai river. Eventually, the inheritors of Ahmed Shah Abdali's legacy withdrew from the area, toward the direction of Jalalabad.

Battle of Sirikot (1824)

Sirikot lay less than ten miles to the north-west of Haripur. This Mashwani village was strategically placed in a basin at the top of the north-east end of the Gandhgarh Range, which made its secure location a haven for the rebellious chiefs in the entire region. Hari Singh Nalwa went towards Sirikot before the rains of 1824. It was another six months before the attempt produced conclusive results. The Sardar almost lost his life in the course of this expedition. Ranjit Singh's military campaign for the winter of 1824 was scheduled towards Peshawar and Kabul. While stationed at Wazirabad, he received an arzi (written petition) from Sardar Hari Singh informing him that he and his men were overwhelmingly outnumbered – one Sikh to ten Afghans. Ranjit Singh marched to [Rohtas], from there to [Rawalpindi] and via [Sarai Kala] reached Sirikot. With news of the approach of the Sikh army, the Afghans withdrew.

Battle of Saidu (1827)

The redeemer of the Yusafzais came in the form of one Sayyid Ahmad, who despite being a 'Hindki' was accepted as a leader by them. Budh Singh Sandhanwalia, accompanied by 4,000 horsemen, was deputed towards Attock to assist in suppressing the Yusafzai rebellion. The Maharaja's brief required him to thereafter to proceed towards Peshawar and collect tribute from Yar Mohammed Khan Barakzai. Budh Singh first heard of the Sayyid after he had crossed the Indus and encamped near the fort of Khairabad. Ranjit Singh was still on the sickbed when the news of the Sayyid's arrival, at the head of a large force of the Yusafzai peasantry, reached him. The gallantry of the Yusafzai defence in the Battle of Nowshera was still vivid in his mind. On receiving this news, he immediately put into motion all the forces

that he could muster and immediately dispatched them towards the frontier.

The Barakzais in Peshawar, though outwardly professing allegiance to the Sikhs, were in reality in league with the other Afghans. The Sayyid marched from Peshawar in the direction of Nowshera. Sardar Budh Singh wrote to the Sayyid seeking for a clarification of his intention. The Sayyid replied that he wished to first take the fort of Attock and then engage Budh Singh in battle.

Hari Singh Nalwa stood guard at the fort of Attock with the intention of keeping the Sayyid and his men from crossing the river until reinforcements arrived from Lahore. News had reached the Sikhs that the jihadis accompanying the Sayyid numbered several thousand. The battle between the Sayyid and the Sikhs was fought on 14 Phagun (23 February) 1827. The action commenced at about ten in the morning. The Muslim war cry of Allah hu Akbar, or "God is the greatest", was answered by the Sikhs with Bole so nihal, Sat Sri Akal, or "they who affirm the name of God, the only immortal truth, will find fulfilment". Ironically, the opposing forces first professed the glory of the very same God Almighty, albeit in different languages, before they commenced slaughtering each other. The cannonade lasted about two hours. The Sikhs charged at their opponents, routed them, and continued a victorious pursuit for six miles, taking all their guns, swivels and camp equipment. 150,000.

Occupies Peshawar (1834)

The occupation of the great city of Peshawar and its ruinous fort, the Bala Hisar showered that it was a reflection of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa's formidable reputation in the region. Masson arrived in Peshawar just in time to see the Sikhs take control of the city. His

eyewitness' account reports that the Afghans withdrew from the region and Hari Singh Nalwa occupied Peshawar without conflict.

Dost Mohammad Khan withdraws (1835)

Hari Singh Nalwa was the governor of Peshawar when Dost Mohammed personally came at the head of a large force to challenge the Sikhs. Following his victory against Shah Shuja at Kandahar, in the first quarter of 1835, Dost Mohammed declared himself padshah (king), gave a call for jihad and set off from Kabul to wrest Peshawar from the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh directed his generals to amuse the Afghans with negotiations and to win over Sultan Mohammed Khan. He directed them that on no account, even if attacked, were they to enter into a general engagement until his arrival.

Hari Singh Nalwa and the other Sikh chieftains requested Ranjit Singh to permit them to engage with the Afghans. On 30 Baisakh (10 May 1835), Sardar Hari Singh, Raja Gulab Singh, Misr Sukh Raj, Sardar Attar Singh Sandhanwalia, Jamadar Khushal Singh, the Raja Kalan (Dhian Singh), Monsieur Court, Signor Avitabile, Sardar Tej Singh, Dhaunkal Singh, Illahi Bakhsh of the topkhana, Sardar Jawala Singh and Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia were ordered to move. The troops fanned out over five kos, forming a semicircle in front of the Amir's encampment. Sardar Hari Singh proposed that the water of the stream Bara, which flowed in the direction of Dost Mohammed Khan's camp, be dammed. When the Ghazis appeared, Sardar Hari Singh commenced firing his guns. The Maharaja, however, prohibited him from indulging in battle and dispatched his Vakils to negotiate with the Amir.

Dost Mohammed Khan was assured that the Sikhs would affect a truce until their Vakils were in his camp. He accused Fakir Aziz-ud-din of making "use of much language, having plenty of leaves but little

fruit". On finding both his step brothers, Jabbar and Sultan, irredeemably lost to him, Dost Mohammed decided to retire from the field with the whole of his army, armament and equipage. He left at night, making sure that the Fakir did not return to the Sikh camp until after he had gone through the Khyber Pass.

Jamrud (Khyber Pass) (1836)

In October 1836 following the Dussehra celebrations in Amritsar, Hari Singh made a sudden attack on the village of Jamrud, at the mouth of the Khyber Pass. The Misha Khel Khyberis, the owners of this village, were renowned for their excellent marksmanship and total lack of respect for any authority. Hari Singh Nalwa's first encounter with this tribe had taken place following the Battle of Nowshera when he had pursued the fleeing Azim Khan; and once again, when he chased Dost Mohammed Khan in 1835.

The occupation of Jamrud was rather strongly contested but it appeared that the place was taken by surprise. On its capture, Hari Singh Nalwa gave instructions to fortify the position without delay. A small existing fort was immediately put into repair. News of this event was immediately transmitted to Kabul. Masson informed Wade of the passage of events along this frontier in a letter dated 31 October 1836. With the conquest of Jamrud, at the very mouth of the Khyber, the frontier of the Sikh Empire now bordered the foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains.

Panjtaar defeated (1836)

The defeat of the Khyberis sent shock waves through the Afghans. Hari Singh Nalwa accompanied by Kanwar Sher Singh, now proceeded towards the Yusafzai strongholds, north-east of Peshawar,

which had withheld tribute for three years. The Sikhs defeated the Yusafzais, with their chief, Fateh Khan of Panjtar, losing his territory. It was reported that 15,000 mulkia fled before the Sikhs, many being killed and the remaining taking refuge in the hills. After burning and levelling Panjtar to the ground, Hari Singh returned to Peshawar realising all the arrears of revenue. Fateh Khan was obliged to sign an agreement to pay tribute on which condition Panjtar was released. When news of the conquest of Panjtar reached the Court of Lahore, a display of fireworks was proposed.

Battle of Jamrud (1837)

The Maharaja's grandson, Nau Nihal Singh was getting married in March 1837. Troops had been withdrawn from all over the Punjab to put up a show of strength for the British Commander-in-chief who was invited to the wedding. Dost Mohammed Khan had been invited to the great celebration. Hari Singh Nalwa too was supposed to be at Amritsar, but in reality was in Peshawar (some accounts say he was ill) Dost Mohammed had ordered his army to march towards Jamrud together with five sons and his chief advisors with orders not to engage with the Sikhs, but more as a show of strength and try and wrest the forts of Shabqadar, Jamrud and Peshawar. Hari Singh had also been instructed not to engage with the Afghans till reinforcements arrived from Lahore. Hari Singh's lieutenant, Mahan Singh, was in the fortress of Jamrud with 600 men and limited supplies. Hari Singh was in the strong fort of Peshawar. He was forced to go to the rescue of his men who were surrounded from every side by the Afghan forces, without water in the small fortress. Though the Sikhs were totally outnumbered, presence of Hari Singh Nalwa put the Afghan army into panic. In the melee, Hari Singh Nalwa was grievously wounded. Before he died, he told his lieutenant not to let the news of his death out till the arrival of reinforcements, which is what he did. While the Afghans knew that Hari

Singh had been wounded, they waited for over a week doing nothing, till the news of his death was confirmed. The Afghans withdrew after witnessing Nalwa's body hung outside the fort. Hari Singh Nalwa had not only defended Jamrud and Peshawar, but had prevented the Afghans from ravaging the entire north-west frontier, in turn was not able to invade Afghanistan himself. The loss of Hari Singh Nalwa was irreparable and this Sikh defeat was costly for that precise reason.

The victories in battles that were achieved over the Afghans, were a favourite topic of conversation for Ranjit Singh. He was to immortalise these by ordering a shawl from Kashmir at the record price of Rs 5000, in which were depicted the scenes of the battles fought with them. Following the death of Hari Singh Nalwa, no further conquests were made in this direction. The Khyber Pass continued as the Sikh frontier till the annexation of the Punjab by the British.

Administrator



Hari Singh Nalwa on Elephant.

Hari Singh's administrative rule covered one-third of the Sikh Empire. He served as the Governor of Kashmir (1820–21), Greater Hazara (1822–1837) and was twice appointed the Governor of Peshawar

(1834-5 & 1836-his death). He worked closely with 2nd in command of the Khalsa Army, the Hindu 'Raja Mahan Singh Mirपुरi' on many affairs related to administration.

In his private capacity, Hari Singh Nalwa was required to administer his vast jagir spread all over the kingdom. He was sent to the most troublesome spots of the Sikh empire in order to "create a tradition of vigorous and efficient administration". The territories under his jurisdiction later formed part of the British Districts of Peshawar, Hazara (Pakhli, Damtaur, Haripur, Darband, Gandhgarh, Dhund, Karral and Khanpur), Attock (Chhachch, Hassan Abdal), Jehlum (Pindi Gheb, Katas), Mianwali (Kachhi), Shahpur (Warcha, Mitha Tiwana and Nurpur), Dera Ismail Khan (Bannu, Tank, and Kundi), Rawalpindi (Rawalpindi, Kallar) and Gujranwala. In 1832, at the specific request of William Bentinck, the Maharajah proposed a fixed table of duties for the whole of his territories. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa was one of the three men deputed to fix the duties from Attock (on the Indus) to Filor (on the Satluj).

In Kashmir, however, Sikh rule was generally considered oppressive, protected perhaps by the remoteness of Kashmir from the capital of the Sikh empire in Lahore. The Sikhs enacted a number of anti-Muslim laws, which included handing out death sentences for cow slaughter, closing down the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar, and banning the azaan, the public Muslim call to prayer. Kashmir had also now begun to attract European visitors, several of whom wrote of the abject poverty of the vast Muslim peasantry and of the exorbitant taxes under the Sikhs.

The Sikh rule in lands dominated for centuries by Muslims was an exception in the political history of the latter. To be ruled by 'kafirs' was the worst kind of ignominy to befall a Muslim. Before the Sikhs came to Kashmir (1819 CE), the Afghans had ruled it for 67 years. For the Muslims, Sikh rule was the darkest period of the history of the place,

while for the Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) nothing was worse than the Afghan rule. The Sikh conquest of Kashmir was prompted by an appeal from its Hindu population. The oppressed Hindus had been subjected to forced conversions, their women raped, their temples desecrated, and cows slaughtered. Efforts by the Sikhs to keep peace in far-flung regions pressed them to close mosques and ban the call to prayer because the Muslim clergy charged the population to frenzy with a call for 'jihad' at every pretext. Cow-slaughter (Holy Cow) offended the religious sentiments of the Hindu population and therefore it met with capital punishment in the Sikh empire. In Peshawar, keeping in view "the turbulence of the lawless tribes ... and the geographical and political exigencies of the situation" Hari Singh's methods were most suitable.

Diplomatic mission

In 1831, Hari Singh Nalwa was deputed to head a diplomatic mission to Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of British India. The Ropar Meeting between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the head of British India followed soon thereafter. The Maharaja saw this as a good occasion to get his son, Kharak Singh, acknowledged as his heir-apparent. Hari Singh Nalwa expressed strong reservations against any such move. The British desired to persuade Ranjit Singh to open the Indus for trade.

Legacy



'The Rock Aornos from Huzara. From Nature by General James Abbott
1850'

Nalwa was also a builder. At least 56 buildings were attributed to him, which included forts, ramparts, towers, gurdwaras, tanks, samadhis, temples, mosques, towns, havelis, sarais and gardens. He built the fortified town of Haripur in 1822. This was the first planned town in the region, with a superb water distribution system. His very strong fort of Harkishengarh, situated in the valley at the foothill of mountains, had four gates. It was surrounded by a wall, four yards thick and 16 yards high. Nalwa's presence brought such a feeling of security to the region that when Hügel visited Haripur in 1835-6, he found the town humming with activity. A large number of Khatri migrated there and established a flourishing trade. Haripur, tehsil and district, in Hazara, North-West Frontier Province, are named after him.

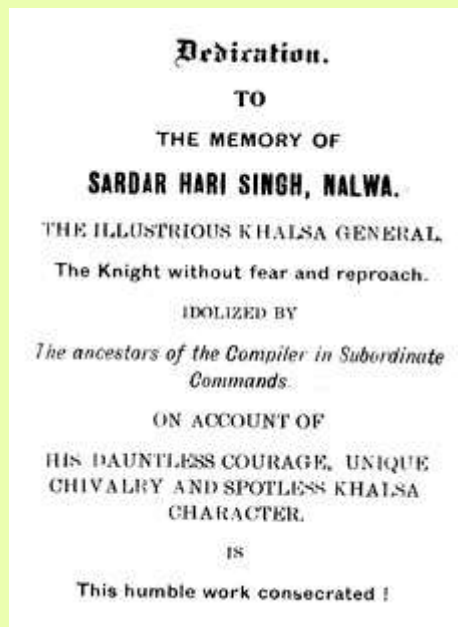
Nalwa contributed to the prosperity of Gujranwala, which he was given as a jagir sometime after 1799, which he held till his death in 1837.

He built all the main Sikh forts in the trans-Indus region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — Jehangira and Nowshera on the left and right bank respectively of the river Kabul, Sumergarh (or Bala Hisar Fort in the city of Peshawar), for the Sikh Kingdom. In addition, he laid the

foundation for the fort of Fatehgarh, at Jamrud (Jamrud Fort). He reinforced Akbar's Attock fort situated on the left bank of the river Indus by building very high bastions at each of the gates. He also built the fort of Uri in Kashmir.

A religious man, Nalwa built Gurdwara Panja Sahib in the town of Hassan Abdal, south-west of Haripur and north-west of Rawalpindi, to commemorate Guru Nanak's journey through that region. He had donated the gold required to cover the dome of the Akal Takht within the Harmandir Sahib complex in Amritsar.

Following Hari Singh Nalwa's death, his sons Jawahir Singh Nalwa and Arjan Singh Nalwa fought against the British to protect the sovereignty of the Kingdom of the Sikhs, with the former being noted for his defence in the Battle of Chillianwala.



A tribute to the Champion of the Khalsaji. Hari Singh Nalwa's leadership qualities continued to inspire the Sikhs 81 years after his death (front page of a book published in 1918)

A commemorative postage stamp was issued by the Government of India in 2013, marking the 176th anniversary of Nalwa's death.

Death

Hari Singh Nalwa died fighting the Pathan forces of Dost Mohammed Khan of Afghanistan. He was cremated in the Jamrud Fort built at the mouth of the Khyber Pass in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Babu Gajju Mall Kapur, a Hindu resident of Peshawar, commemorated his memory by building a memorial in the fort in 1892.

Popular culture

Hari Singh Nalwa's life became a popular theme for martial ballads. His earliest biographers were poets, including Qadir Bakhsh urf Kadaryar, Misr Hari Chand urf Qadaryaar and Ram Dayal, all in the 19th century.

In the 20th century, the song Mere Desh Ki Dharti from the 1967 Bollywood film Upkaar eulogises him. Amar Chitra Katha first published the biography of Hari Singh Nalwa in 1978 (see List of Amar Chitra Katha comics).

On April 30, 2013 the Indian Minister of Communications Kapil Sibal released a commemorative postage stamp honouring Hari Singh.

Hari Singh Nalwa Champion of the Khalsaji 1791-1837, a biography by Vanit Nalwa – a direct descendant of the general – was published in 2013. It is being adapted into an Indian feature film by Prabhleen Kaur of Almighty Motion Picture.

